

Center for Children's Advocacy

University of Connecticut School of Law, 65 Elizabeth Street, Hartford, CT 06105

TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF S.B. 981: An Act Concerning the Placement of Young Children in Congregate Care Facilities

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a non-profit organization based at the University Of Connecticut School Of Law. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy.

We strongly support Raised Bill 981 which will greatly reduce the number of young children placed in group care facilities rather than families.

Group Residential Care is Harmful to Young Children

Virtually every clinical study done on the effects of placing young children in congregate (group or institutional) care concludes that that **group care harms young children's emotional and cognitive development** by denying them the nurturance and attention from consistent parental figures.¹

For young children, all learning - emotional, social, motor, and cognitive - is developed by positive, consistent experiences with a regular caregiver.² Unfortunately, children living in group care experience a multitude of caregivers who change depending on the day and the shift and therefore cannot act as a primary attachment figure.³ This is so regardless of the nurturance, generosity and dedication of staff members and groups assigned to work with the small child.

Connecticut Still Places Too Many Children Birth To Five in Group Residential Care

In 2009, **248 birth to five year olds were placed in congregate care settings**. The number of young children placed in congregate care in 2009 was 18% greater than the number placed in these types of settings in 2008, and 41% greater than the number placed in congregate care in 2007.⁴

To its credit, DCF has taken steps to reduce the number of young children placed in group homes or residential facilities over the past year. However, even more needs to be done.

According to the Juan F. Federal Court Monitor's Third Quarter report:

A majority of children "overstay" in SAFE homes. Of the 100 children in SAFE homes during the Third Quarter of 2010, almost **sixty-percent of the children stayed longer than 60 days, with 14 children staying in the group homes for longer than 6 months.**

Congregate Care for Children is a Costly and Unwarranted Investment of State Dollars

A Connecticut collaboration between Yale researchers and DCF to study the effectiveness of group care for young children showed that these placements proved an **expensive failure**

¹ Nelson, III, Charles A., et al.. "Cognitive Recovery in Socially Deprived Young Children: The Bucharest Early Intervention Project," 318 *Science* 1937 (2007).

² Meiselman Titus, Jennifer R.. "Adding Insult to Injury: California's Cruel Indifference to the Developmental Needs of Abused and Neglected Children From Birth to Three." *California Western Law Review*. Fall 2002.

³ Harden, Brenda. "Congregate Care for Infants and Toddlers: Shedding New Light on an Old Question." *Infant Mental Health Journal*, Vol. 23(5), 476-495. 2002.

⁴ Letter and Report from the Office of the Child Advocate, dated March 16, 2010.

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We strongly support Bill 981 which will greatly reduce the number of young children placed in group care facilities rather than families. Virtually every clinical study done on the effects of placing young children in congregate care concludes that that group care harms young children in group residential care by denying them the nurturing and attention from group caretakers.³ This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a non-profit organization based at the University Of Connecticut School Of Law. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy.

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when it came to increasing permanency for children, shortening duration of their time in state care, or preventing re-abuse after care.⁵

The average cost to keep a child in a **SAFE** home placement is well over \$200 per day⁶ – money that can be spent more effectively spent providing training and support for foster caregivers or providing in-home supports to promote reunification.

Congregate Care Not Necessary to Promote Sibling Placement

The amount of money it costs to maintain a child in group residential care for two months could fund family support services for a year!

SAFE homes are not necessary to achieve accountability regarding sibling placement. Connecticut General Statute § 46b-129(g) already requires DCF to place siblings together wherever possible.

Additionally, one of the *Juan F* Outcome Measures requires DCF to place siblings together 95% of the time, though the third quarter 2010 report indicates that DCF was successful in facilitating sibling placement in roughly 80% of cases.

The answer to keeping siblings together is to ensure that all of the children are maintained in families, preferably in kinship care. Today, only 13% of the abused and neglected children receiving appropriate services and placement⁷ receive mandatory services for their families' safety, permanency and well-being.⁸ The Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act and its corresponding regulations provide that states must ensure they are meeting children's needs for "safety, permanency and well-being."⁹ The federal government periodically assesses states' compliance with child welfare mandates through the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR), and states that fail to meet required outcomes for several key child welfare outcome measures including: 1) making diligent efforts to locate Rounds 1 and 2 of the 2008 CFSR, Connecticut did not achieve substantial conformity in children may be subject to substantial fiscal penalties. According to performance ratings from Rounds 1 and 2 of the 2008 CFSR, Connecticut did not achieve substantial conformity in of, and providing services to parents, foster parents, and children.

All of Connecticut's children deserve to grow up in families. Research tells us that for our youngest citizens, children birth to five, consistent and nurturing relationships are essential for home permanency planning program for children who first enter out-of-home care." Safe Home: Is it worth the cost? An evaluation of a group utility of Group Care in Child Welfare Services," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 29, 623-643, 2005. , DeSena, Murphy, Douglass-Palumbo, Ball, Kelly, Howitz, and Kauthmar, "Safe Home: Is it worth the cost? An evaluation of a group utility of Group Care in Child Welfare Services," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 29, 623-643, 2005.

Bath, Richard P., "Foster Home Care is More Cost-Effective Than Shelter Care: Serious Questions Continue to be Raised About the Child Welfare Information Gateway, PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN WITH RELATIVES (Washington, D.C., July 2010), available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/scholars/research/factsheets/report7.htm>.

CGS, § 17a-3; 17a-11; 1A-15;

45 CFR, Part 1347 § 1355.33(b).

10 Report regarding CFSR and Connecticut based reviews can be found on the web at www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/dis/pdfs/family_connection_and_kinship_care_activities_f_80-09.pdf.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Their healthy development. It is imperative that per the requirements of Raised Bill 981 that residential placement be used only for children who have such complex health problems that their needs simply cannot yet be met in a family setting.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Healy Eggen, JD
Director of the Child Abuse Project
Center for Children's Advocacy

